

The Mob and the Maid — By Damon Runyon

OUTSIDE, a cold wind was beating upon the New Mexican hills, and, with a chilling rain as a lash, was whipping a mass of gray clouds across the valley toward the Raton Range. There was a suggestion of snow in the air, and the sheep had huddled up close to the adobe house, hanting themselves along the hillside. They looked like spray caught in the rocks alongshore.

Inside we were as warm and comfortable as a hearty supper and a roaring eight feet of fireplace could make us. Old Jim Worrell, our host, was idly braiding a quirt, and we were smoking and gossiping about the ranchmen along the Cimarron. Old Worrell had some observation or reminiscence about each one.

"First time I ever see old Jesus Gonzales was back in '71," he remarked, speaking of his nearest neighbor, accounted the wealthiest man in the valley. "How'd he get his money? Well, I don't know about that. By being honest, I suppose. When he first came out here he was a freighter. He had a team of steers, but finally he got tired of freighting and turned the steers out on pasture. In a few years the steers had multiplied into a large herd of cattle."

"You know Bill Cavasch, down on the lower range? Well, Bill he came to this country about the time I did and all he had was a pair of branding-irons. In a few years them brands of his'n was hung on everything that runs on four legs around this country, and he was thinking some of branding the two-legged critters, when they all up and abandoned the country to him."

"It only goes to show what perseverance and a pair of branding-irons will do for a man."

"Take Check Chase, who owns the Circle Zero over here. Check's not a wife, but he didn't do it on purpose. Check got to playing poker one night with Sam Hailo-way. They both owned pretty good ranches and some sheep. Sam was married, and his wife had something of a reputation hereabouts for temper and homeliness."

"Check won all the money Sam had on him, and the game was just getting exciting. Finally Sam offers to bet everything he owns in Colfax County against everything Check owns. Check agrees and wins the pot. Sam skipped out the next morning. When Check went to take possession of Sam's place and told Mrs. Sam the circumstances, she says:

"Everything he OWLS, eh? All right; that includes me. I belong to you now, Mr. Chase. Come to my arms!"

"But Check didn't. He was so scared he hopped on his horse and lights out, and he's never been near her since. She still lives on the ranch, now one of the best in the territory, and she always refers to it as Check's, and to Check as her husband. Check he don't take no road that leads in eight miles of the ranch."

"Did you ever see Jose de la Cruz, who lives down on the Thinchers? He's one of the wealthiest Mexicans around here, and always has been. Ever notice how he lets his hair grow long on the sides? That's because he's shy a couple of ears."

"I'll tell you why, but first I've got to introduce Nondas Garcia to you. And Johnny Everson. Johnny and Nondas don't live around here now; all this happened a long time ago."

anyhow, when we was a lot younger.

"Nondas was the prettiest thing you ever saw in your life anywhere. She was full-blood Mexican, and daughter of old Candido Garcia, who owned the El Morello ranch and who was sheriff of the county the time I'm telling about."

"Nondas was animated dynamite. She could ride like a cow-puncher and shoot a rifle or revolver better than any man around here, and she was mostly doing it, too."

"Jose de la Cruz was a young fellow then, and lived on the ranch next to Garcia's. He was stuck on Nondas, and she seemed to be on him. They was always together. Old Garcia and old De la Cruz was tickled stiff at the idea of joining them two ranches."

"Johnny Everson was a long, lank, good-looking kid, who'd been doing odd jobs around this country for some years. He was an Easterner, but he'd forgotten it, like the rest of us."

"In them days, when government was young, we had to give the sheriff and most of the other important offices to the Mexicans, but we reserved the right to dictate the principal deputies ourselves. So when we elected old Garcia sheriff we named Johnny as his under sheriff."

"The county seat used to be over at Trinchera, and the sheriff lived there during his term of office. His job was no snap either, because the country was just getting civilized and he had plenty to do. The jail was an adobe building, one story high, next to the court house. Johnny stayed in town most of the time; and old Garcia, who liked his authority a good deal, was also there pretty much."

"Nondas used to come galloping into town with De la Cruz at her heels about every day, and all hands was smacking their lips, thinking about the big festa Garcia would give when they got married."

"And I expect all our dreams would have come out all right if Nondas hadn't seen Johnny and Johnny hadn't seen Nondas. First thing we know Johnny was hanging around after her like a shadow, and she seemed to like it, too. You can bet De la Cruz didn't. He gave Johnny some fierce looks, and scowled at him fearful, but Johnny didn't mind. Nondas egged them both on. She was like all girls, and appreciated competition."

"Johnny got to acting like a moon-eyed calf, and his friends felt worried about him a lot. No one ever figured it was anything serious, however. We thought Nondas would string Johnny along just for fun to make De la Cruz sore, but when the time got around for her to marry she would marry her Mexican."

"One time there was a fandango down at Gonzales, and Everson couldn't be there. He was out hunting some rustlers. Johnny had a reputation for sticking to duty that he thought a heap of it, because in them days the Mexican officials were not always what you might call painstaking. They allowed themselves to be diverted a good deal."

"Old John Campbell was joking Nondas about her two admirers—just to worry De la Cruz, who was there, of course—and she was taking it good-natured. "I guess Jose here is the most faithful of the two," said old John. "I'll bet he wouldn't be running off after rustlers when there was a chance to dance with you. Ain't much he wouldn't do at your order, is there?"

"And why not Senor Everson?" asked Nondas. "Well, Johnny might do a good many things for you, but if it conflicted with his duty he'd balk," says old Campbell."

"What will Senor Campbell wager that Senor Everson would not abandon duty at my word?" she asked."

"Old John looked her over for a moment and says: 'Ten head of cattle against a kiss.'"

"Done!" says Nondas in a flash. Every one in the room had heard the bet, and most of the Americans there was close friends of Johnny's. Nondas seemed to think of this, because she said:

"I must ask that no one tell Senor Everson of the wager."

"Of course no one could after that, and no one thought about the bet as anything but a joke, anyhow."

"You can believe that De la Cruz was not pleased with the bet. I watched his dark, scowling face, and he was considerably disturbed. I thought it would do no harm to tell Johnny to keep his eye on that fellow, first chance I got."

"Nondas got to coming to town oftener than ever, and used to come without De la Cruz. She and Johnny used to take long rides together, and they were getting pretty thick. How it would have panned out if it had run to a peaceful conclusion there's no telling. A few drinks of Martinez's whiskey brought it to a rapid-fire decision."

"One drink of old Martinez's whiskey would make a rabbit spit in a hound's face. I think the record was six drinks and a reach, and that was made by Big John Summers, foreman of the Long's Canon outfit, just before he passed from our midst along of being a trifle slow after calling Sid Carruthers a liar."

"Anyhow, a sheep-herding cuss



"Nondas shows she is still a woman by flopping over into his arms in a faint."

from down the valley comes along and gets outside of a lot of that liquid barb wire and runs amuck. Candido Garcia went to arrest him, and the sheep-herder sticks a knife into Candido from a foot to a foot and a half. It didn't hurt Candido a whole lot, but it made him pretty sick. Johnny Everson pounds the sheep into docility and packs him off to jail. A sawbones catches old Garcia up almost as good as new, but he has to go to bed."

"Nondas comes tearing into town when she hears of it, and stays with her father. That night Everson calls on her to sympathize with the old man, but mostly with Nondas. I don't know how they got around to the sheep-herder, but Nondas says:

"Some of the boys think he ought to be lynched to teach a lesson."

"Maybe he ought," says Johnny, "but he won't be; not while I'm in charge of him."

"What?" asks Nondas, flaring up. "Do you mean to say you wouldn't let them lynch a man who hurt my father?"

"You bet I wouldn't," says Johnny.

"Supposing I'd ask you to?" says Nondas.

"I wouldn't do it," Johnny answers.

"Now, here was a new one on Nondas. She recollected her bet with old Campbell, and she commenced to get sore."

"Senor Everson," she says, you

say you love me. If I asked you to do something for me that happened to interfere with what you calls your duty, which would you consider first—love or duty?"

"Duty," says Johnny, without waiting a second.

"She got up and left him without a word, but she was boiling inside."

"Ah, them Mexican girls of the old days! All Chile pepper and red blood! They don't make 'em that way nowadays!"

"Don't you think that Johnny Everson wasn't sore, either. The idea that a girl would ask him such a question made him hot, so he just laughed a bit and went off the other way and told his troubles to his friends. We all remembered Nondas's bet with old John; and while

we didn't tell Everson, it tickled us that he had refused her. We wanted to see her pay that bet to Campbell."

"Nondas rode out of town all alone early that evening, headed for the El Morello. Bill Martin, who runs the general store, saw her go, and told Johnny about it. Johnny rode after her, but came back in an hour madder than thunder."

"She says she's going to get Jose de la Cruz and a bunch of Mexicans down the valley and come back here and take that prisoner away from me," he told a crowd of us over in Martin's."

"What'd you say?" asks some one.

"I told her if De la Cruz comes pestering around that jail I'll shoot his ears off," says Johnny, looking fierce. "And I'll do it, too. Then he walks out, calling back at us: 'Don't none of you fellows interfere, no matter what happens. This is my funeral.'"

"Old Martin makes a speech right away."

"Tell you what it is, he says. 'I ain't for mixing up in love affairs, but if the little she-cat comes back here with any greasers and they hurt Johnny there'll be more funerals than his'n.'"

"And he picks up a Winchester and commences slipping shells into it without another word."

"That's whatever," says Spike Baldwin, corral boss of the Box outfit, and he goes to looking over his six pistol."

"The rest of us go busy inspecting our arsenals, when old Peters has an idea—which was strange for him."

"Let's wait and see what they do first," he suggests. "We can be near enough to stop any harm to John, but I think he'd rather handle it alone."

"After talking it over for a while, we thought so, too. So we decided to wait around and see what happened. We weren't opposed to them greasers lynching another of their own kind, but we didn't want them to hurt Johnny."

"I got it from a range-rider afterward what happened when Nondas got to the Garcia ranch and sent for De la Cruz. She was so mad by this time she was in tears. She told Jose how her father had been cut down by a worthless sheep-herder, and even then might be dying. The American, Everson, had the sheep-herder in jail, and when she had suggested that he be given over for punishment the American had laughed at her."

"Of course, you can't blame De la Cruz for rising to the occasion. Nondas told him that she had told Johnny she intended getting De la Cruz to take the sheep-herder from jail, and there wasn't anything left for Jose to do. She also told him that Johnny had declared he would shoot Jose's ears off. In the presence of a dozen of the herders and range-riders, Nondas told De la Cruz:

"Jose," she said, "if you go and take that sheep-herder from the American, I'll marry you to-morrow. But not if you lose your ears."

"This was about as plain urging him to shoot Everson first as you'd want to hear. De la Cruz was naturally hog-wild when he heard her. He commenced beating up all the Mexicans on the two ranches, and he got about fifty altogether. They were all anxious to go just for the excitement of the thing; not that they wanted trouble particularly."

"Nondas insisted on going with the crowd, and early the next morning they came riding into town like a herd of soldiers, Nondas and De la Cruz out in front."

"Every American in town was on deck when they arrived, and there seemed to be a few weapons scattered among them."

"The jail, as I told you, was next to the court house, in the centre of town, which was laid out around the two buildings. Both the jail and court house backed up against a hill, so there was only one approach to it, and that was by the front. We had scattered out and found places behind the houses near the jail in easy range, where we could see everything that went on."

"No one had seen hide or hair of Johnny since he left Martin's store, but we knew he was somewhere around that jail."

"Nondas and De la Cruz rode up the street with their pack of

pirates, until they got about fifty yards from the jail. Then they stopped, puzzled by the quiet. The front wall of the jail ran up above the roof, leaving about two feet of breastwork on top, and pretty soon Johnny's head came a-peeping over the top. He had a rifle in his hand, and he looked some mad."

"What do you want?" he hollered.

"We want your prisoner, Senor Everson."

"Go 'way," said Johnny. "Go 'way and go home."

"De la Cruz then took a hand."

"Senor Everson," he said in Mexican, which Johnny understood better'n he did English, "resistance is useless. You'd better give up the murderer at once and avoid trouble."

"I'll give you thunder if I catch you looking like you wanted him," said Johnny."

"He looked mighty brave standing up there all alone, and as behind the houses were commencing to get sore on that gang in the road trying to bluff him."

"Nondas whispered something to De la Cruz and started to ride up to the jail, the others standing still. She had a rifle in her hand, but Johnny only grinned at her."

"Then some of the Mexicans started off as though to make a circle of the jail. De la Cruz stood still with the others, Johnny was watching them all closely. Nondas had just reached the jail door when something happened."

"There was a shot, and every one who was looking saw a puff of smoke from De la Cruz's saddle. He had fired from his hip."

"Johnny yelled and dropped behind his breastwork like he was shot. Nondas turned just in time to see De la Cruz fire, and heard Johnny holler. Things commenced to move so fast then that we didn't sift out an explanation until it was all over."

"The Americans behind the houses hadn't figured on there being any shooting at all. We thought that Johnny was hit, and started on a run for the jail. We heard Nondas shriek, then raise her rifle, and commence cutting loose at De la Cruz and his mob. I saw De la Cruz suddenly clap his hands to his head, yell, and then wheel his horse and start off on a dead run, his gang following him so fast they'd have run over him if his horse hadn't been best."

"Meantime we were going for the jail, but Nondas suddenly turned on us and commenced pumping lead in our direction. Well, you can't shoot back at a woman, so we did the next best thing and ran for cover. Before we got clear old man Martin got a piece of his hair and a bit of scalp torn off, but no one was hurt."

"Then the doors of the jail opened, and out comes Johnny, the alivest thing you ever saw in your life. Nondas she shows she is still a woman by flopping over into his arms in a faint."

"We didn't get it all until we saw Johnny that night. We was sore on Nondas for shooting at us, but Johnny's story smoothed it all over."

"You see," says Nondas told De la Cruz that she was to be no shooting under any circumstances. She says when she saw her scheme went to pieces. She saw I wasn't going to scare, and she was riding up to tell me about that fool bet you all know about and get me to let them take the prisoner out just long enough to save her face. She said she meant to make some excuse to return him right away, but she wanted to show every one she had me fadd, I'd have let her do it if I'd known."

"Then Jose must have got suspicious, and thought he'd bump me off to save any future trouble. When she saw me drop, which was only a bluff, Nondas got mad at De la Cruz, she says, and commenced shooting at him. Then when your bunch started rushing in she thought it was the other part of her own crowd, and turned loose in your neighborhood to keep you from breaking open the jail. After causing all the trouble, in the first place, she decided that it was her business to hold that prisoner for me. That's all."

"Son," said old man Martin, rubbing his head, "are you all going to marry that Nondas?"

"Sure," says Johnny.

"Well, my advice is to keep her away from shooting hardware," says Martin."

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